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Migration Discourse and the New Socially Constructed Meanings of the English Lingua Franca

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Abstract

After the 1990s, the mass arrival of immigrants in Europe transformed the phenomenon of migration from a benefit into a problem and opened the debate to issues of first aid, security, expulsion and rejection. Even today, migrants are no longer seen as a socio-economic resource to be protected and regulated, but as a potential social problem affecting areas such as the economy, health and national security. The paper deals with the linguistically relevant literature about migration discourse (MD) and the role of English as lingua franca in public discourse related to the migration phenomenon. The latter part examines some traditional English key terms used to represent migrants since their mass arrival in Europe after the 1990s and concludes with the current international debate conducted by the mass media and non-governmental organizations on the new, socially constructed meanings that some migration terms have acquired in the English lingua franca over the past decades.

Keywords: Migrants, refugees, socially constructed meanings, English lingua franca

Introduction

Migration studies is a multidisciplinary field which refers to many and different subfields, such as the history of human migration, sociology of migration, postcolonial studies, demography (statistics), immigration

economics and law, human rights and critical border studies, debates on migrants by host communities or political institutions, and migration language studies. If the importance of immigration to human affairs cannot be ignored, neither can the countless sociolinguistic consequences that migration phenomena have, especially in the social contexts of areas more exposed to the arrival of migrants and refugees. Although linguistic studies are fewer in number compared to the numerous multidisciplinary studies of the phenomenon, Migration Discourse (MD) has been investigated through qualitative and quantitative analyses that have recently combined different approaches and methods.

The paper provides an overview of migration discourse research dealing with the linguistically relevant literature about MD and the role of English as a lingua franca in public discourse related to the migration phenomenon. The latter part examines some traditional English keywords used with reference to migrants since their mass arrival in Europe after the 1990s, and concludes with the current international debate conducted by the mass media and non-governmental organizations on the new, socially constructed meanings that some migration terms have acquired in the English lingua franca over the past decades.

Linguistic relevant literature

Among the branches of linguistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has had a prominent position in migration discourse research since the mid-1990s, contributing with many discourse-analytical studies on migration, minorities–and racism. The CDA scholars have mainly dealt with the polarization – good *vs.* bad – which characterizes and reflects ideologies or abuses of power in discourses: in-groups *vs*. out-groups, lack of choice *vs*. personal choice (van Djik, 1993, 2018; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Prieto Ramos, 2004; Richardson & Colombo, 2013; De Fina, 2003; Schrover & Schinkel, 2013; Korkut, 2013). A recent contribution by Van Dijk (2018) offers readers a systematic method to study MD, highlighting that "the complexity of discourse as a linguistic, political and cultural object or phenomenon characterises migration discourse, which represents a vast *class* of *different discourse genres*" (p. 230):

- media discourse with news reports in press, TV, radio, the Internet;
- editorial interviews, reportages, cartoons, letters to the Editor;
- political discourse with parliamentary debates on bills, policy documents, party programs, political speeches, electoral campaigns;
- legal discourse with bills or laws, international agreements, treaties, police discourse, crime reports, interrogations, trials;

- educational discourse with textbooks or lessons, classroom and teacher-student interaction; administrative discourse such as interactions with officials, forms, applications;
- social movement discourse with official declarations, meetings, protests, slogans, conversations among members;
- the Internet discourse with websites, blogs, social networks like Facebook or Twitter;
- artistic discourse with novels, poetry, theatre, TV shows and soaps;
- individual discourse with everyday face-to-face dialogues among migrants or between them and the host communities, letters, e-mail messages and chats.

These genres are primarily defined by their reference, that is, by what they are about: "the many aspects of migration as a social and political phenomenon" (Van Dijk, 2018, p. 230). Moreover, migration genres can be defined in terms of contextual information (i.e. who, when, where, for whom and how) as well as in terms of their style, meanings or type of discourse structure (i.e. argumentative, narrative, persuasive etc.).

Other scholars, such as Martìnez Guillem (2015), have dealt with the diversity of circumstances in which MD occurs, focusing on "the power relations, created, sustained, and/or challenged through migration discourses and their associated practices in institutional settings" (p. 5) such as education, the mass media or political institutions. Martìnez Guillem (2015) also provides a comprehensive overview of the areas explored by the Language and Social Interaction research (LSI) highlighting the several links between language and migration issues or between language and migrants' experiences.

In a nutshell, migrants, who cross borders in the traditional sense, are aware that they are entering a new environment with a different language, culture, rules, so they must strain to learn the new target language or adapt to the rules of the target country. Lack of knowledge and a high or adequate level of proficiency in the target language can strongly influence the achievement of better living conditions, while the previous knowledge of a second language can determine the choice of the final destination. For example, migrants from formerly colonised countries, where English or French is one of the official languages, often move to English- or French-speaking countries where they can easily get good job opportunities by using their language skills.

Furthermore, arriving in a new country is always associated with a "cultural shock" (Martìnez Guillem, 2015, p. 2), i.e. a kind of personal disorientation experienced by people who move to a partially or completely different cultural environment. To overcome this cultural shock, first-generation migrants may prefer to have little contact with the host community in order to preserve their traditions, their culture, their language, viz. their

identity. Under this perspective, language maintenance – i.e. also the transmission of their mother tongue to future generations – plays a crucial role in preserving their identity as well as their need to belong to a certain group, language, and community. At the same time, language maintenance does not preclude cross-linguistic influences and language change. Through code-switching the mother tongue of first-generation migrants is influenced by the main language spoken in the destination country. On the other hand, second-generation migrants (i.e. their children), who grow up in the educational system and the new social settings become bilingual, adopting a new identity or new values that are more or less in line with the culture of the national majority community. Indeed, research has revealed that many second-generation migrants are caught in the tension between the need to acculturate themselves and the desire to maintain their linguistic heritage (Sindoni, 2016).

Finally, from an institutional standpoint, the educational systems of the states more affected by the mass arrival of migrants are involved in managing the schooling of a multilingual society. The linguistic competence of migrants is one of the main issues that make educational institutions another interesting field of enquiry to analyse the relationship between migration discourses and social dispositions. In these countries, governments must decide whether to provide a uniform or different type of learning for citizens and migrants, whether and how to help non-citizens overcome their perceived target language deficits (Martìnez Guillem, 2015; Martín Rojo 2010). Within this scenery, the European institutions, that have been investing and working to promote multiculturalism and multilingualism since the 1950s in their geographical areas, play a crucial role. Certainly, today they have to deal with the different cultures and values of non-EU migrants, who create new social challenges and economic needs that require quick decisions and solutions.

Bearing in mind most of the circumstances in which language issues interplay with migration phenomena, the following section addresses the scenario in which recent migration flows interact not only with the new social and economic realities, but also with a pre-eminent language for communication in the migration field, the English lingua franca.

The role of English as a pre-eminent language

Since the early 1990s, advances in transport and communication technologies, that led to the idea of a globalized world with a single economy and culture, have resulted in what the sociologist Steven Vertovec (2010) has called "superdiversity". Superdiversity is the increase in categories of migrants not only in terms of the traditional concepts of nationality, ethnicity, language and religion, but also in terms of motivational drivers, patterns and routes of migration, labour and housing markets of host societies etc. In other words, according to Vertovec globalization has changed the face of social,

cultural and linguistic diversity in societies throughout the world and replaced the multiculturalism that characterized the early era of migration (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). Whereas in the past, there was a real separation between migrants and the social, cultural and political environment of their mother country, today the new long-distance communication technologies, mobile phones and the Internet enable migrants to maintain active communication with their fellow countrymen, introducing new forms of identity, community establishment and cooperation.

In this age of globalization, English has rapidly become the pre-eminent language worldwide, a global lingua franca (ELF), spoken by non-native speakers whose language skills range from adequate to bilingual competence. It has also become a shared medium of communication for all purposes and at all levels, impacting education, work and culture around the world (Crystal, 2007; Jenkins, 2015). Among these non-native speakers of ELF, who have inevitably given rise to new varieties of English, migrants represent a significant number of users, without ignoring the fact that English is the official language in most of England's former colonies (e.g. India, Nigeria, Ghana) from which a considerable number of migrants have come in recent years. Scholars such as Piller and Takahashi (2011), for example, have focused on the relationship between English proficiency and social inequalities in English-speaking contexts, where those who do not speak standard English suffer from racism and discrimination by organizational decision makers. On the contrary, globalization proves how the knowledge of English is also a prerequisite for social inclusion or exclusion even outside English-speaking contexts, since good English skills can lead to success in employment, education, settlement, social adaptation or sustainable livelihoods all over the world (Pavlenko, 2005; Vertovec, 2007).

In this panorama, Migration Discourse is defined as an umbrella term that covers all the "distinct and communicative practices that accompany the phenomenon of migration" (Martìnez Guillem, 2015, p. 1). Two main types of actors are involved in these communicative practices: institutions that work to reinforce territorial borders and migrants who are engaged in border crossing.

MD is also a public discourse because the main discussions about the phenomenon involve and influence large segments of the population and focus on national and international issues on which people are divided. Moreover, even though MD does not refer to a single group of experts, it shapes its own identity as a specialized language through the use of lexical and syntactic features that can be simultaneously or alternatively drawn from the specialized languages of other domains such as statistics, law, economics, linguistics, sociology and politics.

Finally, according to Van Dijk (2018, p. 230) MD is often a "constituent part" of the migration phenomenon itself, especially when it focuses on people, culture, history, traditions, difficulties, identity, language issues, wars, and work or when communicative practices are carried out by migration actors or spectators who use recurrent and specific linguistic elements evoking stereotypes or concepts related to nationality, identity, race, ethnicity and class.

With regard to the English lingua franca of the migration phenomenon, the interest in this area from a linguistic standpoint is confirmed by different efforts such as the recent studies on the lexis to identify migrants (Maryns, 2006; Guido, 2008; Pietrini, 2020) and the publication of glossaries to harmonize terminology such as the EMN "Asylum and Migration Glossary" and the IOM "Glossary on Migration". The EMN "Asylum and Migration Glossary", was first published by the European Migration Network (EMN) in 2008. The latest edition was updated in 2018 and serves as a common vocabulary of current terms and concepts in all the languages of the European Member States to ensure better understanding and equivalence of terms related to the migration and asylum phenomenon in the European contexts and legislative procedures. The IOM "Glossary on Migration" was first published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in 2019. It is a collection of terminology related to migration aimed at all those dealing with migration issues at the international level to create a common understanding of migration terms. The following part of the paper focuses on some key terms traditionally used to refer to migrants and the current international debate on the new, socially constructed meanings that some terms have acquired in the English lingua franca.

Insights on the key terms of migration

The lexis related to the migration phenomenon is the first aspect that can easily describe those properties which converge with the lexicon of English specialized languages especially when the migration discourse is used in institutional contexts. European scholars have recently paid particular attention to some key migration terms and their derivatives such as *immigration, immigrant, migration, migrant, refugee, alien, asylum (asylum seeker), expatriate, clandestine* (Pietrini 2020). All these key terms have a Latin origin and, at first sight, they seem to be equivalent especially if one considers their denotation, namely the direct relationship between each term and the object, idea or action it denotes (McArthur, 1992). However, if we consider their connotation – i.e. the emotive and associative aspect of the terms (McArthur, 1992) – it becomes clear that each of them has its own semantic aspect that several scholars have analysed in order to explore the different ways in which migrants are identified in different contexts (Pietrini, 2020).

With regard to the first key term *migrant* from the Latin *migrare* (to move from one place to another), it is both a noun and an adjective in English. The same happens in other languages such as Italian in which its root gave rise to the adjective *migratorio* which has replaced the less frequent *emigratorio* or *immigratorio*. As far as this aspect is concerned, the Italian Treccani dictionary underlines how the adjective *emigrato* was used to label Polish refugees in France or England in the mid-nineteenth century leading to the English adjective *emigré* (borrowing from French), which for a semantic relocation today refers to an "emigrant of any nationality, especially a political exile" (OED 2. *EMIGRÉ*), that is broadly speaking a foreign educated and cosmopolitan person (e.g. *emigré artist*).

The most general and current definition of the noun *migrant*, which is the clipping of *immigrant*, is 'a person who moves from one place to another, especially to find work or better living conditions'. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) confirms this definition of a "person who moves permanently to live in a new country, town, etc., especially to look for work, or to take up a post, etc." (OED 3a. *MIGRANT*), although the dictionary also defines *migrant* as a "person who moves temporarily or seasonally from place to place" (1a).

Mariani (Pietrini, 2020, pp. 37-56), who has analysed the terms chosen in the EU texts to represent migrants and refugees between 1950 and 2016, highlights how in European texts the term *migrant* is a hypernym of *immigrant* and *emigrant* and refers primarily to both *economic migrants* and *forced migrants*, despite the United Nations' call for a clear distinction between migrants and refugees (the EU forced migrants). In Euro-English,[1] the term *migrant* can thus refer to a person who emigrates to find work (e.g. *short- or long-term migrant*, *highly-qualified migrant*, *seasonal worker*, etc.) or to a person who is obliged to migrate (e.g. *displaced person*, *asylum seeker*, *refugee*, etc.).

As far as the term *refugee* is concerned, the OED defines the noun, from French *refugié*, as a "person who has been forced to leave his or her home and seek refuge elsewhere, especially in a foreign country, from war, religious persecution, political troubles, the effects of a natural disaster […]" (OED 1b. *REFUGEE*), mentioning a figurative and extended use. The OED also refers to a negative sense of *refugee*, denoting a "person who is fleeing from justice, deserved punishment, etc; a runaway, a fugitive" (OED 1c. *REFUGEE*). However, *refugee* has an officially fixed definition, in English lingua franca, given by the international United Nations Multilateral Treaty, i.e. the *1951 Refugee Convention*. The document, recognizing the right of people to seek

[1] Euro-English is an emerging variety of English used mainly among the EU staff and in European legal documents as well as by other continental European speakers who use English as a second or foreign language.

protection from persecution in other countries, states that a "*refugee* is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (Art.1). The term *refugee* is thus numbered among those migration terms officially defined by international law documents that are binding in the participating states.

A similar example of what can be considered an officially fixed monoreferentiality of some migration terms is given by the definition of the term *abduction*, from the Latin *abduction, abductionis*. The OED defines *abduction* as "the action of taking someone away by force or deception, or without the consent of his or her legal guardian" (2a) and refers to *kidnapping*, the popular equivalent of *abduction* in everyday English. Moreover, the term *abduction* is properly a legal term, defined as the "offence of taking away a wife, child or ward, by fraud and persuasion, or open violence" by the Model Penal Code (§212.4). It moved from the English legal field to the field of migration human traffic acquiring an officially fixed definition at the international level, namely "the act of taking someone by force, fraud or persuasion" according to Art. 3 [a] of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nation Convention against Transnational Organized Crime" (2003).

Another key term is the noun *alien* defined by the OED in several ways. The meaning closest to the one used in the migration field is "a foreigner who is not a naturalized citizen of the country where he or she is living; a foreign national" (OED, b4. *ALIEN*). Pietrini (2020) has observed that the English term *alien* carries the negative connotation of the Latin *alienus* (someone who is foreign, unusual, inappropriate, dangerous) and can be associated to the Italian *extra-comunitario*, highlighting that in English the prefix *extra-* is replaced by *non-* such as for *non-citizen, non-native, non-national*. Nonetheless, as observed by the Oxford University researchers (see the following paragraph), British media have given the term a negative connotation by using the association *illegal alien* referring to *illegal* and *undocumented migrants*.

In relation to *asylum*, the OED included the most frequent compound *asylum seeker* in 2001, defining it as "a person seeking refuge, especially political asylum, in a nation other than his or her own". Similarly, in the European laws, the term which comes from the Latin *asylum* (calque of the Greek *ἄσῡλον* meaning refuge or sacred place) is often associated with those migrants, *asylum seekers*, who apply for refugee status (asylum) and are waiting for the result of their claim.

In the period between a refugee's application and admission by one of the EU states, the EMN Glossary recognizes some subcategories of these applicants naming them through what can be considered a new category of Euro-English migration terms: *refugee in orbit*, *refugee in transit*, *refugee sur place*. *Refugee in orbit* is a conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) that evokes the state of being or moving in an orbit. The term refers to a person who "although not returned directly to a country where they may be persecuted, is denied asylum or unable to find a state willing to examine their request and are 'shuttled' from one country to another in constant research for asylum". *Refugee in transit* refers to people who are "temporarily admitted in the territory of a State under the condition that they are resettled elsewhere" (EU source UNHCR). *Refugee sur place* has a double meaning depending on the context in which it is used. In the global context (namely Global English), the compound refers to a person who is not a refugee when he/she leaves his/her country of origin but who becomes one, having acquired a well-founded fear of persecution at a later date. In the EU context (namely Euro-English), a *refugee sur place* is a person who has been granted the refugee status on the basis of international protection needs, which have arisen in loco, after he or she left his or her country of origin.

In addition, the European legislation has also given rise to other new compounds such as *asylum shopping*, another metaphor evoking the action of visiting one or more shops to buy or look at goods. In particular, in the context of the Dublin Regulation (EC n. 343/2003), *asylum shopping* refers to the phenomenon where a migrant person "applies for international protection in more than one EU member state with or without having already received international protection in one of those EU Member states" which he/she has already crossed. On this occasion, the Dublin Regulation stipulates that the asylum application must be submitted and registered in the first European country of arrival and that the decision of the first country where the application is made is final for all the other EU countries. The metaphor *asylum seeker* thus refers to the possibility that applicants in the past could 'shop' for an EU visa in one of the European countries by taking advantage of possible alternatives in the member states' legislation. 'Shopping' ascribes a relaxed freedom of choice to the migrant applicant and places the EU in a slightly inferior position, as victim of this freedom of the migrant. However, it is worthy of note that migrants or refugees cannot have the same ease and purchasing power as an ordinary European citizen for two main reasons: the vulnerability of their situation and the nature of their purchase.

Another migration term is *expatriate*, which in English is both an adjective and a noun. Originally, an *expatriated person* was someone living in a foreign country (OED, B adj. *EXPATRIATE*), later it was given the additional connotation of a person living in a foreign country by his or her own choice

(OED, *EXPATRIATE*, draft additions 1993). This semantic redefinition, which can be considered a new socially constructed meaning, has been one of the subjects of the ongoing international debate on migration terminology. More specifically, in an article in *The Guardian*, entitled *Why are white people expats when the rest of us are immigrants?* (13 March 2015), the author highlights how *expat* – the colloquial back-clipping or truncation of *expatriate* – has over time been applied exclusively to Western white people who go abroad to work, placing them above other ethnic groups for whom only the adjective *migrant* is reserved (see also Gualdo in Pietrini, 2020, p. 72). Otherwise, the EMN Glossary does not list the headword *expatriate*, while the IOM Glossary defines it as a "person who voluntarily renounces to his or her nationality" in line with the way the term is used in some national laws where expatriation involves the voluntary renunciation (and termination) of all civil and political rights granted by the previous nationality or citizenship. At the same time, in the notes the IOM Glossary mentions the colloquial use of the term to refer to nationals who have settled in another country for professional reasons.

With regard to the term *clandestine*, the OED defines the adjective as "usually in bad sense, implying craft or deception; underhand, surreptitious" (OED, *CLANDESTINE*), without any mention to the field of migration. The IOM Glossary confirms the OED negative connotation of the adjective by listing the compound *clandestine migration*, without any definition, and considering it as synonymous of *illegal migration*. In this regard, it is worthy of note that in Italian the *immigrato clandestino* (Treccani, adj.) refers to a person who crosses Italian borders illegally and can be used as a noun too, e.g. "le stime dei clandestini in Italia" (trad. estimates of illegal immigrants in Italy).

To sum up most English terms have entered the migration domain, through International or European laws, moving from British English to Global or Euro-English. Some of them have been semantically redetermined to meet the needs of using an appropriate terminology at each stage of the communication process in official texts dealing with the migration phenomenon. The creation of glossaries such as the EMN Glossary and the IOM Glossary also confirm the need to harmonize English migration terminology locally and internationally. The following section looks at the international ongoing debate on the new meanings that some traditional terms related to migration have acquired and the call for a new vocabulary that evokes empathy for migrants and refugees.

The demand for an empathy-evoking vocabulary

Since the 1990s the increasing use of negative or alarmist terms in public migration discourse has affected the way migrants are perceived around the world, mostly in the states that have come under pressure from the large

number of migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean. Just think of European societies where migrants and refugees have been associated with economic crises or health and crime threats and governments have had to deal with the rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism, economic issues (austerity), terrorism or far-right political movements.

The discourse on migration in newspapers and the media has always been a good example to illustrate its status as a public discourse. Indeed, the mass media play a significant role in shaping the migration phenomenon and consequently in influencing public opinion around the world, because people are largely informed about migration through the mass media that report events and actors in a certain way, choosing certain words or emphasizing others that can easily change perceptions of reality, since language creates realities. Scholars (Pietrini 2020) also believe that the mass media have used a static migration vocabulary, currently rich in negative connotations that have reinforced adverse public attitudes towards migrants seen as criminals, as a threat or as victims. Broadly speaking, news is a platform for socially constructed meanings and connotations which are echoed by individuals in interpersonal communication. Thus, although most migration terms have a static definition laid down in international documents, some of them have recently acquired a meaning that is the result of human interaction, reflecting ideas and perceptions that exist only because people share or agree with them.

Based on this representation of migrants by the mass media, a recent study, *Migration in the News* (2013) by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford systematically examined how *immigrants*, *migrants*, *asylum seekers* and *refugees* were portrayed by newspapers in the UK from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2012. Their scientific method consisted of analysing a corpus of forty-three million words, which confirmed not only the most frequently recurring themes, but also the most repeated words that occur when migrants are mentioned. In searching for the most common modifiers associated with the above-mentioned words, it was found that the adjective *illegal* is the most common modifier of *immigrant*, while *failed* is the most common modifier of *asylum seeker*. Other results from word association have shown how migrants or asylum seekers are often labelled through the vocabulary of numbers (e.g. thousands, millions, tens), terms from legal or security discourses (e.g. *terrorist*, *suspected*) and the language of vulnerability (e.g. *destitute*, *vulnerable*).

The corpus also revealed that journalists use different collocations and terms often overlap when referring to each of the four groups (*immigrants*, *migrants*, *asylum seekers* and *refugees*). The term *migrant* is more often associated with economic terms than *immigrant* (e.g. *jobs*, *benefits*, *economy*). *Refugees* tend to be associated with a variety of international terms (e.g.

fleeing, camp, border). *Asylum seekers* are more often cited in debates about immigrants and migrants, rather than about refugees.

Studies, such as the one carried out by the Migration Observatory at Oxford University, show how in recent years the study of the lexicon, which has always been the most studied linguistic aspect of specialized languages, has been one of the main focal points of many scholars interested in migration discourse as a public discourse and as a specialized discourse in legal documents (Pietrini, 2020). Moreover, the recent negative connotations suffered by some terms used to identify *migrants* have been the subject of ongoing international debates among various actors such as non-governmental organizations and editorials. Thus, while in the past, the main trend of the mass media was to portray migrants negatively by creating the urgency of a crisis or an unnecessary state of alarm in the fields of welfare, economy and security, today the use of affective and evaluative language that supports empathy towards migrants is promoted.

One of the first debaters was Al-Jazeera, the international news channel that plays a significant role in the political panorama of the Middle East. It claimed in 2016 that "[t]he umbrella term *migrant* is no longer fit for purpose when it comes to describing the horror unfolding in the Mediterranean. It has evolved from its dictionary definitions into a tool that dehumanizes and distances, a blunt pejorative" (Malone, 2015). Al-Jazeera argued that migrants are a "nuisance" when they reach their destination and "numbers" when they die in the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, it is better to speak of "migrants and refugees" by distinguishing between them, because when tragedies occur public opinion and journalists do not know whether they are voluntary or forced migrants (i.e. refugees). As already said, the difference in meaning between the two terms *migrant* and *refugee* lies in the driving motivation that causes someone to move from one place of origin to a foreign environment. Whether the migrant moves for various reasons (work, education, family reunion), the *refugee* is driven by a direct threat of persecution or death (Geneva, 2016).

Even examining the glossaries of migration terms, it is clear how migrants are identified by a variety of terms and expressions which sometimes refer to their economic status, sometimes to their legal status and sometimes to their vulnerability such as *long-/short term migrants*, *labour migrants*, *economic migrants*, *seasonal migrant workers*, *illegal migrants*, *irregular migrants*, *undocumented migrant workers*, *migrants in an irregular/regular situation*, *non-documented migrant workers*, *smuggled migrant*, *stranded migrants*, *crisis-affected migrants*, *low-paid migrant workers* (IOM 2019; EMN 2018).

The new socially constructed meaning of *migrant* was transferred to other terms which were considered by the discussants as condensation

symbols that evoke emotions, also due to the use of more influential tools such as images of people crossing the Mediterranean in fishing boats or climbing over walls and fences of other state borders. Under the headword *illegal alien*, to take just one example from the IOM Glossary, a note clarifies that the term *alien* has acquired a negative connotation over the years as it is "sometimes used as synonymous to foreigner, non-national or non-citizen" suggesting an artificial distance and sense of "otherness". For this reason, other terms should be preferred to refer to those who are not nationals of a country and may find themselves in an irregular situation. Furthermore, the descriptor *illegal* (*alien*) carries a criminal connotation which is "against migrants' dignity and undermines the respect of the human rights of migrants" (IOM 2019, *ILLEGAL ALIEN*).

In their preface to the IOM Glossary, the compilers underline that they have advocated for a more humane approach to migration by calling on the international community to end the use of dehumanizing terms related migration, such as *illegal migrants*, in favour of the more neutral phrase of *migrants in an irregular situation*. The change in the use of these terms – they write – not only serves "for the sake of political correctness" but also helps shape perceptions of the reality of migrants. The glossary is conceived as a "living document", available online and updated regularly, both to reflect the evolving use of the language and to fulfil the traditional role of glossaries, that is harmonizing the use of migration terminology by clarifying concepts and terms for which legal or long-standing definitions already exist (IOM 2019, Preface).

Mike Videler (2017), from the portal Humanity in Action, highlighted how the choice of terminology affects public attitudes and how recent pressures on societies have enabled the rise of far-right political movements such as the UK Independence Party and Donald Trump's successful presidential campaign in the USA. Videler advocates for neutral migration terminology, i.e. correct and ethical words to talk about migrants and mentions Al Jazeera's contribution, by emphasizing that migrant and refugee are words which evoke emotions. In line with the findings of social psychology research, he argues that public opinion is more inclined to recognize the "fellow humanity" of migrants when they are portrayed in terms of "women, men, children, sons, daughters" as in extended phrases such as "the man who came from Libya" or "these people who fled Syria".

In a BBC article, Ruz (2015) agrees with Al-Jazeera's decision not to use the hypernym *migrant* that dehumanizes and distances people from the difficulties and tragedies of people crossing the Mediterranean. Indeed, *refugee* implies a sort of obligation towards them such as the chance to apply for asylum. Otherwise, there are those who are convinced that a refugee is a person who has completed the legal process of claiming asylum and think of

migrant as an umbrella term which can cover all those who move from one place to another and wait for asylum. The author insists also on other controversial collocations such as *illegal migrant* and quotes Don Flynn, Director of Migrant Rights Network, according to whom it is better to use *irregular* or *undocumented* because the use of *illegal* associates the migrant with a criminal behaviour which threaten national security and not with his/her action of crossing borders without a regular permission. At the same time, if an asylum seeker applies for asylum and his/her claim is refused, it is not correct to consider him/her an *illegal migrant.* On the contrary, Judith Vonberg, from the Migrants' Rights Network too, believes that using the two words *migrant* and *refugee* may reinforce the dichotomy (bad) personal choice *vs*. (good) lack of choice, (bad) migrant *vs*. (good) refugee.

Similarly, Colford (2013) – from the American Associated Press – disagrees with the descriptor *undocumented*, claiming that a "person may have plenty of documents, just not the ones required for legal residence" in the host country. Considering that the English language is constantly evolving and enriching itself with new words, phrases and usages, the Associated Press suggests using "illegal" with reference to the act of migration (e.g. *illegal migration*), by preferring the use of variants such as a person who "enters a country illegally" or "without legal permission". Moreover, in line with their objectives, the Associated Press Guide for Newspapers and the News Industry explicitly calls for avoiding the use of *illegal alien*, *illegals* or *undocumented*, and invites to specify, wherever possible, the way someone entered a country illegally (e.g. they crossed borders or overstayed their visa).

In conclusion, many efforts have been made to show how a different rhetorical strategy can be a useful tool to oppose discrimination against migrants. All the commentators recognize the need to use empathy-evoking vocabulary since, as Phillips (2014) points out, the news does not testify individual stories and the various reasons why people leave their homes. Thus, until we are not ready to better respond to a phenomenon that is one of the most urgent and challenging of our time, it is our duty to use more accurate and relevant labels to help people in need of protection.

Conclusion

Migration discourse is an umbrella term that includes all the communicative practices that accompany the many aspects of migration as a social and political phenomenon. From a linguistic perspective, migration has been studied mainly through the CDA, which has highlighted ideologies and abuses of power in discourses, while the more recent LSI research has pointed out the countless sociolinguistic consequences that migration phenomena have in everyday and institutional contexts of our time.

Globalization, with its new long-distance communication technologies, has enabled migrants to maintain active communication with their fellow countrymen and to introduce new forms of identity, community establishment and cooperation that have replaced the multiculturalism characterizing the early migration. In this globalized era, English has become the lingua franca for migration purposes at European and international levels and its knowledge is now a prerequisite for social integration or exclusion not only within but also outside English-speaking countries.

Moreover, after the 1990s, the mass arrival of migrants, in some particularly exposed geographical areas, transformed the migration phenomenon into a potential social problem that the mass media contributed to shaping negatively by creating the urgency of a crisis or an unnecessary state of alarm in sectors such as economy, health and national security. The specific terms and descriptors used in the news influence the way migrants are perceived, so that the traditional terms related to migration have come under scrutiny for their new socially constructed meanings that discriminate much more against migrants and refugees. As a result, an international debate is currently taking place on the language used to address migration issues. From different perspectives and continents, all discussants agree that language creates reality and call globally for a more inclusive language in which the careful choice of words can evoke empathy for migrants.

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